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AUTHOR Henson, Stanley
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ABSTRACT

This study on the attitudes of middle and junior high school students toward extracurricular activities focused on investigating differences in attitudes of male and female students, rural and urban students, and black and white students. Subjects were 1,383 middle and junior high school students randomly selected from 13 school districts in Arkansas who completed the Mid-Years Opinion Questionnaire designed to measure the social perception characteristics of early adolescents. Eight items that comprised the student activities survey were extracted as the dependent variable. The results revealed that males reported more positive attitudes toward student activities than did females in grades 6 through 9, and that rural subjects reported more positive attitudes toward student activities than did urban subjects. In 6th and 9th grades, whites tended to have more positive attitudes than blacks while at 7th and 8th grades, blacks tended to have more positive attitudes than did whites. The findings suggest that middle and junior high schools may need to consider adjusting their student activity programs to stress rewarding both academic and athletic achievements equally and to provide enough student activities for this age group. More research is needed to understand how different ethnic groups may relate to different student activities in the schools. (NB)

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A STUDY OF THE ATTITUDES OF EARLY ADOLESCENTS TOWARD STUDENT ACTIVITIES

BY

STANLEY HENSON, Ed.D

ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

CG 022087

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STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

One of the characteristics that makes schools in the United States different from schools in other areas of the world is that schools in the United States usually have student activities for their students. The research in the area of student activities is usually directed at how student activities benefit adolescents and the school environment. The purpose of this study is to determine the extent to which school related activities are important to students, which is an important factor given the earlier search for personal identity and the stress at the middle/junior high school level on extra curricula activities and athletic participation and events. This study was directed toward studying three areas. First, how do early adolescent male and female students differ in their attitudes toward student activities? Second, how do early adolescents from rural and urban areas differ in their attitudes toward student activities? Third, how do black and white early adolescent students differ in the attitudes toward student activities?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The increase of middle schools and the middle school movement has directed us to examine the early adolescent age group more closely over the last ten years. The idea of the middle school has placed new emphasis on the real and immediate needs of the early adolescent. At the beginning of the junior high school movement it was believed that early adolescents needed to be in a separate area away from the influences of late adolescents in the senior high school. Since providing relevant student activities was one of the purposes for creating the middle/junior high school, it is important for us to consider how student activities tend to effect the early adolescent and how he/she feels about them. Most junior high schools and middle schools have their own student activity program; however, there is little research in this area.

Research of early adolescents that examines extracurricular activities and its effect on racial tensions and students' self-images shows that extracurricula activities contribute to an improved sense of satisfaction and well being for black and white high school students but does little to influence either the sense of personal efficacy or positive self image. It was also found that desegregated schools that maximize participation in extracurricular activities especially enhance black student participants' sense of well being (Trent and McPartland, 1982). Using the content subjects as extracurricula activities, it was found that clubs and activities in mathematics, science, or computers can effect boys and girls socialization in the schools. Handle points out that boys tend to gain more experience and learning in mathematics than girls when mathematics is considered an extracurricula activity(Handle, 1986). In addition, it has been reported that social skills can be developed from extracurricula activities(Haensly, Lupkowkki, and Edlind, 1985). Peer groups also have an influence by demonstrating that athletic related activities can effect male and female cultures in the schools(Eger, 1987). Other studies report that students gain both

immediate and long termed benefits from participation in student activity programs in the schools(Gholson, 1985). Participation in extracurricula activities can be good predictors of self concept in adolescence(Leonardson, 1986). In examining the relationship of participation in school activities to abilities and interests of high school students, it was found that students tend to participate in student activities because of their interest rather than their abilities.(Dawis and Sung, 1984). It was further investigated to see if students are resegregated in schools through extra curricula activities. Results of the study show that white students in desegregated school participate less than those in all white schools. In terms of types of extra curricula activities, black students participate more in desegregated activities such as athletics, drama, and music while whites are more active in honorary clubs, and interracial contact is diminished in desegregated schools because of the use of tracking or ability grouping procedures.(Trent, 1981)

METHODS AND PROCEDURE

SAMPLE

The subjects of this study consisted of 1383 students taken from thirteen school districts in Arkansas. The subjects were randomly selected from ages ten through fifteen in middle schools and junior high schools.

MEASUREMENT

The subjects were administered the 100 item Mid-Years Opinion Questionnaire which was designed by Thornberg in 1980. The scale contains twelve subscales of social behaviors, and it is designed to measure the social perception characteristics of early adolescents. The scale selected for this study is an eight-item scale which measures student perception of the importance of student activities and athletic participation to the needs of early adolescents as they progress through the middle/junior high school. The instrument is a modified Likert scale with 1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Disagree, and 4=Strongly Disagree. In the tables given in this paper, the lowest mean score indicates the student group is more positive toward the student activities in the schools and the higher the mean score indicates more negative student attitude toward student activities.

RESULTS

A series of analyses were performed to determine any difference in the selected attitude factors of early adolescents attitudes toward student activities as they progressed through the middle/junior high school. Eight items that consisted of the student activities survey was extracted from the Mid-Years Opinion Questionnaire as the dependent variable. The independent variables (grade, sex, rural-urban, and race) were manipulated to indicate any significant

difference. Analysis of variance was used to examine any effects of grade on the early adolescents attitude toward student activities in each group (sex, rural-urban, and race). The analyses represented 2(sex) X 4(grade), 2(race) X 4(grade), and 2(rural-urban) X 3(grade).

The Relationship Between Grade, Sex, and Early Adolescent Attitudes Toward Student Activities

A significant main effect was observed in the dependent variable of attitudes toward student activities and the independent variables of sex and grade. Males reported more positive attitudes toward student activities than females in grades six through nine ($F[1381]=28.62;p<.001$).

Interaction was insignificant ($F[1381]=0.45;p<.72$). Inspection of the mean scores in Table 1 indicates that as male and female subjects progress through grades six through nine, there is no significant change in the degree of change in their attitudes toward the need for student activities in the schools. This relationship is illustrated in Figure 1.

TABLE 1

Early Adolescent Attitudes Toward Student Activities by Grade and Sex

Grade	N	$\bar{X}$	SD
6M	120	20.16	3.30
F	101	21.54	3.68
7M	207	21.52	3.73
F	275	22.45	3.21
8M	247	21.04	3.26
F	193	21.86	3.32
9M	124	22.26	3.40
F	115	23.10	2.80

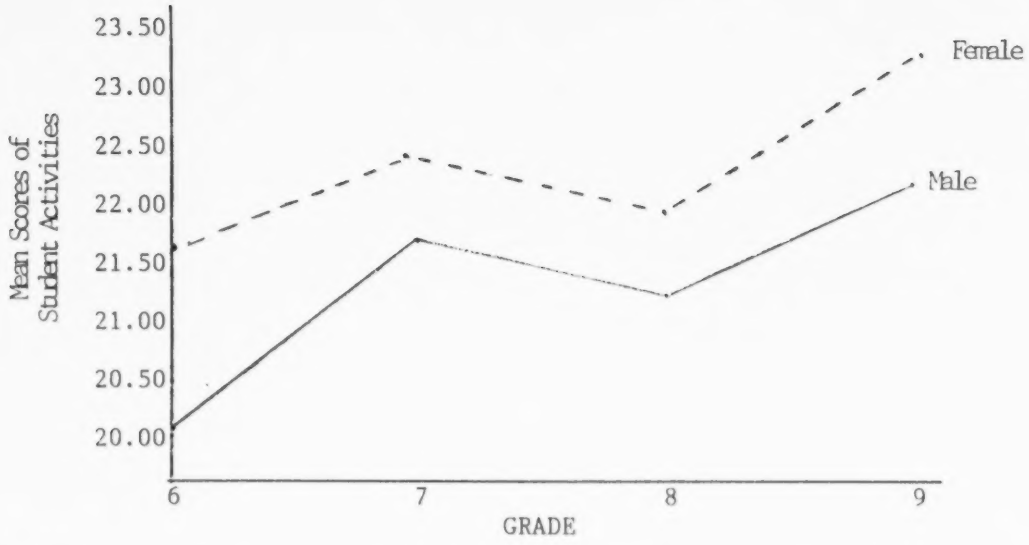

Figure 1. Grade Differences Between Male and Female Attitudes Toward Student Activities

The Relationship Between Grade, Urban-Rural, and Early Adolescent Attitudes Toward Student Activities

The analysis that implemented the measure of grade and urban-rural as independent measures yielded a significant difference with the dependent variable for the main effects ($F[1381]=37.24;p<.001$). No significant interaction between the groups of rural-urban and grade was reported ($F[1381]=0.27;p<.76$). As shown in Table 2, the mean scores of rural early adolescents indicate more positive attitudes toward student activities in the schools while urban early adolescents mean scores indicate that they do not feel the activities are as important. Figure 2 gives a graphic representation of the two groups.

Table 2

Early Adolescent Attitudes Toward Student Activities by Grade and Rural-Urban

Grade	N	$\bar{X}$	SD
7U	196	22.74	3.22
R	286	21.58	3.56
8U	169	22.16	3.23
R	271	20.93	3.27
9U	200	22.92	3.12
R	39	21.03	2.98

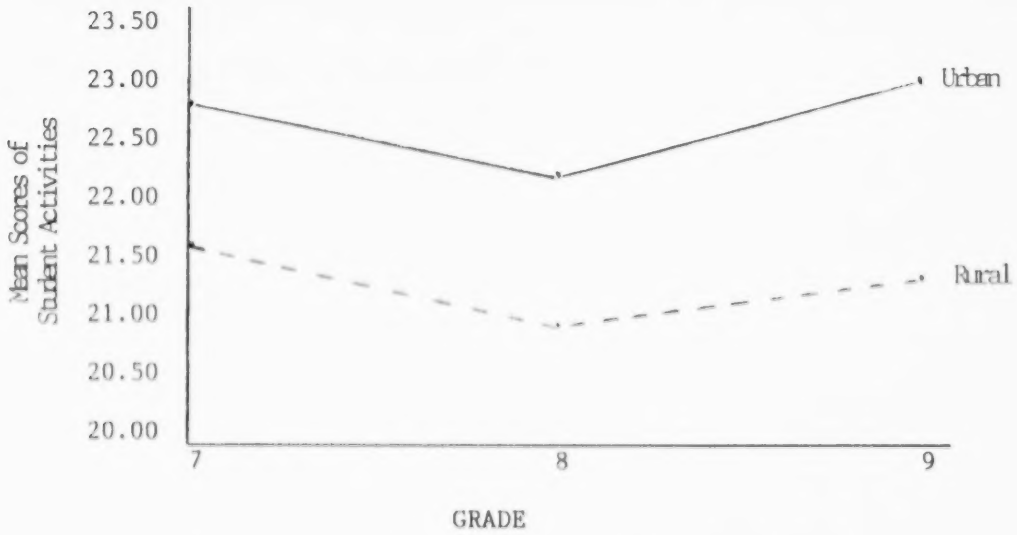

Figure 2. Grade Difference in Urban-Rural Attitudes Toward Student Activities

The Relationship Between Grade, Race and Early Adolescent Attitudes Toward Student Activities

In order to examine any cultural differences, the attitudes of black and white groups were investigated. A significant difference was reported for the main effects between attitude toward student activities and race ($F[1381]=5.23;p<.02$). Significant interaction was

reported between the groups of black and white early adolescents ($F[1381]=0.90; p<.44$). As shown in Table 3, at the sixth and ninth grade white subjects tend to have more positive attitudes toward student activities than black students while at the seventh and eighth grade black students tend to have more positive attitudes than white subjects. Significant interaction occurs at the seventh grade and between the eighth and ninth grade. This is pointed out in Figure 3.

TABLE 3

Early Adolescent Attitudes Toward Student Activities by Grade and Race

Grade	N	$\bar{X}$	SD
6B	47	20.91	3.73
W	174	20.76	3.49
7B	105	22.01	3.53
W	377	22.06	3.45
8B	102	21.20	3.19
W	388	21.46	3.35
9B	151	22.83	3.30
W	88	22.37	2.86

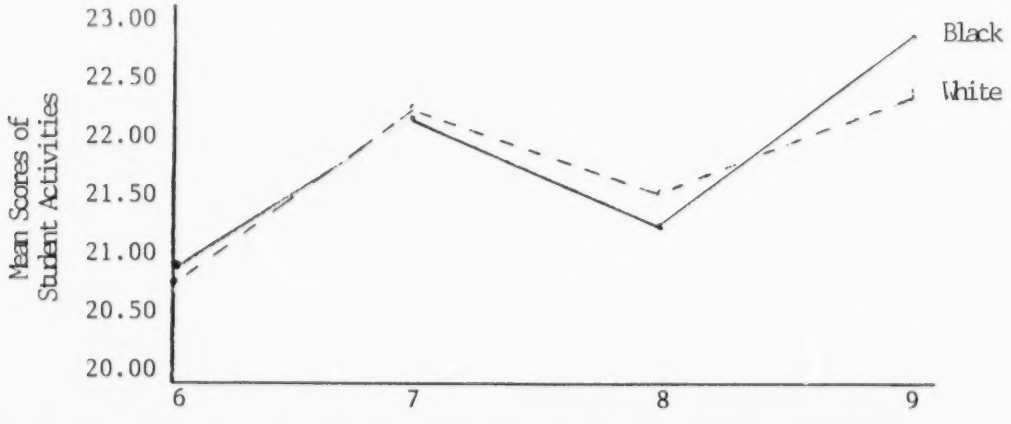

Figure 3. Grade Differences in Black-White Attitudes Toward Student Activities

DISCUSSION

This study clearly points out that males seem to have more interest and tend to be more motivated than females toward student activities. However, males may be feeling more pressure to fulfill their sex role expectations from peers and parents, and school clubs, activities, and athletic programs may be a way to achieve this. Another possibility may be that school activities are important ways for the male to have more of a clear definition of his identity than the female believes. Also, student activities in schools may provide more opportunity for male early adolescents to participate in school activities than their female counterparts. Thus, schools may be offering more student activities and athletic programs to males than to females.

The study also reveals that rural subjects tend to have more positive attitudes toward student activities than urban early adolescents. Rural schools may be able to offer more student activities per student, and rural subjects may have more opportunity to participate in student activities than urban early adolescents in large schools. Thus, the early adolescent in the rural school may feel that he has more opportunity to be a part of the activities and athletic programs and that it is more rewarding than academics. Also, it can be considered that parents and peers may be more active in encouraging this age group to participate in the rural schools than the urban schools.

It is interesting to note that no significant differences exist for black-white early adolescents during the seventh and eighth grade. Apparently, both groups tend to believe that social activities are a major factor to acquiring recognition among peers and/or adults. This study also reports that there is nothing in the schools or physical development that seems to influence their need for recognition through social activities. A high correlation between this age groups perception of adults and student activities may demonstrate that this pressure comes from adults outside of school environment.

This paper suggests that middle/junior high schools may need to consider adjusting their student activity programs to stress rewarding both academic and athletic achievements equally and to provide enough student activities for this age group to participate. Also, this study suggests that more research may need to be done in ethnic groups to understand how different groups may relate to different student activities in the schools.

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